

services performed by customs agencies around the world. These agencies keep the world economy running smoothly by facilitating the movement of imports and exports even during this time of heightened security.

The WCO evolved out of the Customs Cooperation Council (CCC), which initially was a loose conglomeration of a few members. The CCC member countries were dedicated to establishing uniform rules among the varying customs services as a way of expediting the trade process. After the number of participating members surged, the CCC renamed itself the World Customs Organization to stress the true international nature of the organization. Its current membership is 164 countries, indicating the marked dedication in the international community to the harmonization of these processes to hasten the growth of the trade facilitation process.

Our own agency for customs matters has been evolving for years to meet the ever growing demands of our country. After the world dramatically changed on September 11, 2001, the United States had to reevaluate its mechanisms to facilitate the free, yet secure, movement of trade across our borders. The new offices of U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) and U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) were formed within the Department of Homeland Security and remain instrumental in assuring that our border remains safe, yet open to the free transfer of goods and services which support our American workers, consumers, and industries. Thus, CBP has launched an innovative program entitled Project Shield America, which integrates trade with homeland security issues by seeking to prevent the trafficking of dangerous weapons into the United States by illegal exporters, in addition to preventing the illegal export of certain goods and commodities. At the same time CBP is continuing its work with the WCO to harmonize and unify the various customs rules which affect international commerce. Similarly, ICE has undertaken the Cornerstone project, which investigates intellectual property crime, trade fraud, and financial crime. It also participates in the coordination of the Intellectual Property Rights Coordination to protect against violations of intellectual property rights.

Levels of trade are at an all-time high, with imports at \$664 billion and \$12.2 billion in duties collected. The effective operation of customs operations is essential. Thanks to the great strides undertaken by our customs officials and by importers and exporters, 95 percent of FY 2004 entries sampled were found to be compliant with U.S. trade laws.

In the 108th Congress the Committee on Ways and Means examined the changing role of CBP and ICE in our hearing on Customs Budget Authorizations and Other Customs Issues. The Committee will continue its oversight over how CBP and ICE can effectively expedite the movement of goods and services while maintaining the safe borders we as Americans undoubtedly depend upon.

I appreciate this opportunity to personally thank the men and women of Customs for their hard work in continuing to strengthen these vital trade relationships and their vigilance in protecting our borders. I commend their dedication to their role of border protection while continuing to fulfill their long-established mission of trade facilitation.

## CONTINUING CARE FOR RECOVERING FAMILIES ACT

HON. EDWARD J. MARKEY

OF MASSACHUSETTS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Tuesday, February 1, 2005*

Mr. MARKEY. Mr. Speaker, it has only been a couple months since we commemorated the third anniversary of the most devastating attack against our country since Pearl Harbor. It was a solemn day and an occasion to remember the men and women who perished on that clear Tuesday morning. For the families of the victims, September 11 will always be a difficult date on the calendar. Like the World Trade Center families, the Pentagon families, and the families of first responders, the families of the greater Boston area experienced this tragedy personally as two of the four planes involved took off from Logan Airport carrying their loved ones.

Unfortunately, for many of these brave families, their difficult days are not over. Many of the families who continue to struggle are now faced with the loss of their eligibility through the low-cost COBRA health insurance program.

The COBRA program is intended to provide stability to families as they go through a major life transition, and for 120 days following the trauma of September 11th, it provided critical health insurance for families in Massachusetts, New York, New Jersey, Connecticut, Virginia, and elsewhere who lost a loved one. This temporary assistance has already expired for many of these families and without this legislation, more families will lose their eligibility. Without the security of this program they must struggle to find affordable coverage in the private market, pay enormous health care premiums or go without health insurance.

The families who had their loved ones taken away on September 11th have suffered and lost enough. The least we can do for these brave Americans is provide them with continued access to stable and affordable health insurance.

That is why Senator KENNEDY and I are introducing the "Continuing Care for Recovering Families Act." This legislation will allow families of victims of September 11th to buy health care coverage under the federal COBRA program—the temporary low-cost continuation of coverage available for those who change their job, lose their job or for families that lose their chief income earner through death.

The families who lost their loved ones on September 11th continue to face the hardship and trauma of that devastating day with courage and determination. We should do whatever we can to ease the pain of these brave Americans, and I am proud to be introducing legislation today with Senator KENNEDY to provide these families with continued access to low-cost, quality health care.

I urge the Congress to act quickly to ensure that these brave families not have to go without the security and piece of mind that medical insurance provides.

IN RECOGNITION OF THE FRIENDSHIP PACT BETWEEN THE AMERICAN RED CROSS IN GREATER NEW YORK AND JERUSALEM MAGEN DAVID ADOM

HON. CAROLYN B. MALONEY

OF NEW YORK

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Tuesday, February 1, 2005*

Mrs. MALONEY. Mr. Speaker, I rise to share with my distinguished colleagues an article in the January 27, 2005 issue of the New York Sun regarding the recent announcement by the American Red Cross in Greater New York that it intends to forge a partnership with the Jerusalem Magen David Adom, a branch of Israel's emergency medical, ambulance, blood and disaster services.

The article, by Meghan Clyne, a Staff Reporter for the Sun, is as follows:

Entering where the international community fears to tread, the Greater New York chapter of the American Red Cross has signed a friendship pact with the Jerusalem Magen David Adom, Israel's Red Cross society. The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies recognizes as full members 181 national Red Cross organizations—including those from Iran, Cuba and North Korea—but not Israel's.

On February 9, a delegation from the Jerusalem MDA—Magen David Adom means Red Star of David—is scheduled to visit New York as part of a continuing exchange between the societies, to learn from the work undertaken by the New York Red Cross, according to officials from the New York chapter. In late November the New Yorkers journeyed to Israel, where they met with MDA officials in Tel Aviv and Jerusalem and visited a settlement to observe how the MDA responds to, and prepares for, emergency situations. At the end of the trip, members of the New York and Jerusalem groups signed a memorandum of understanding making the cooperation official.

One of the benefits of that cooperation is increased training in responding to terrorist attacks, the CEO of the American Red Cross in Greater New York, Terry Bischoff, said.

"Certainly we believe that given issues Israel has unfortunately had to deal with around disasters and terrorism responses, there are things we can learn from them to enhance our response capability," she said. In exchange, Ms. Bischoff said, the Americans are more experienced in providing mental-health and other support services to victims of terrorist attacks and other disasters, an expertise the Israelis hoped to learn from in dealing with the aftermath of suicide bombings and other attacks.

The New York-Jerusalem cooperation "really builds on a 50-year history . . . the American Red Cross has always been supportive of bringing the MDA into the Red Cross movement," Ms. Bischoff said. While the MDA is not an official voting member of the international federation, Israel's national Red Cross organization enjoys bilateral friendship agreements with several other countries, including France and Bulgaria in addition to America. Ms. Bischoff said those agreements—and greater working relationships between the MDA and other nations' Red Cross and Red Crescent organizations—are helpful to the cause of getting Israel fully recognized by the international Red Cross apparatus.

For its part, Ms. Bischoff added, the American Red Cross signed a friendship agreement with the MDA in 2002 and has withheld \$25 million in dues from the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent